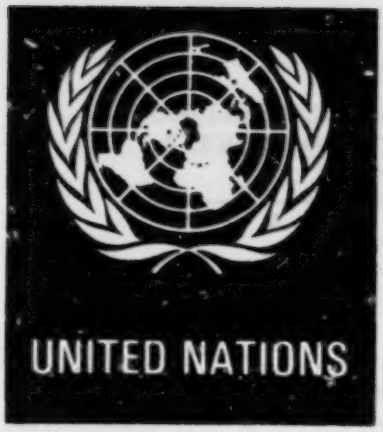

DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Committee met on 4 November 1998 and adopted its report to the fifty-third session of the General Assembly (see A/53/35 and GA/PAL/786). The Committee's report contains the following conclusions and recommendations:

Chapter VII. Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

86. A crucial stage has been reached in the long history of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. The dispossession of the Palestinian people has now passed the half-century mark. Of the two States envisaged under General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, only the Jewish State has come into being, while the Palestinian people still yearns for the establishment of its own State on its national soil. Four million Palestinians still live in refugee camps under precarious conditions. Despite the undeniable achievements of the peace process since 1993, most of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem, remain under occupation, vulnerable to exploitation of resources, land confiscation and encroaching settlements. The area under the Palestinian Authority remains fragmented, its social and economic life jeopardized by damaging closures, lack of free passage and access to the outside world. Thousands of Palestinians are still in Israeli jails.

87. The continuation of this unjust situation and the widespread suffering it entails is unacceptable, particularly since agreements outlining the framework for a peaceful solution were already reached by the parties. The Committee believes that, as humankind prepares to enter the new millennium, it is incumbent upon the co-sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the international community as a whole to do everything within their power to achieve peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which is so essential for international peace and security. In this context, the Committee expressed the hope that the Wye River Memorandum, signed on 23 October 1998, would be fully implemented, provide the much-needed impetus to the Oslo process and help the parties to move forward to the negotiations on permanent status issues.

88. To be truly lasting, peace must be based on solid foundations of justice, respect for human rights and humanitarian law, and relations of equality and partnership between neighbours. The policies and practices of occupation, which seek to create actuality on the ground and to permanently alter the demographic composition of the occupied territory, violate the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood and make the achievement of real peace impossible. The international community, in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must intensify its efforts to ensure protection for the Palestinian people, pending the achievement of a final settlement. The Committee, accordingly, will remain fully engaged in efforts to convene the conference requested by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session.

89. The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement based on international legitimacy is reached. The Committee reiterates that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of

international assistance for development, is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts. As the organ of the General Assembly established to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee pledges itself to continue to mobilize the international community at the governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental levels, in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of this question, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

90. The Committee considers that its programme of meetings in the various regions and its cooperation with non-governmental organizations have played a useful role in heightening international awareness of the relevant issues and in achieving wider recognition of and support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In that regard, the Committee will continue to review and assess its programme in order to achieve maximum effectiveness in its programme of meetings and other activities, and to respond adequately to developments on the ground and in the peace process. Recommendations to that effect will be submitted in due course.

91. In response to the call by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO and President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, for the convening of the millennial celebration at Bethlehem in the context of a global vision of peace and reconciliation, the Committee has requested the inclusion of an item in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly in order to mobilize wide international support for the event. It is the hope of the Committee that the Assembly will adopt a consensus resolution on this item. The Committee is also planning to convene a Bethlehem 2000 international conference in Rome in early 1999. The Committee invites the greatest international participation in this major event.

92. The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat in support of the objectives of the Committee and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other activities, in particular the further development of the UNISPAL collection, and the completion of the project for the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. The Committee also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its usefulness and requests that it be continued.

93. The Committee also considers that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion of the relevant issues, and requests that it be continued, with the flexibility necessary in the light of new developments. The Committee believes that strengthening cooperation and coordination with the Department will help to enhance the special information programme on the question of Palestine and assist the Committee in the implementation of its mandate. The Committee is of the view that cooperation and coordination between the Department and the Division for Palestinian Rights should also be strengthened. The Committee requests the Department to give particular attention to the preparation of audio-visual and other informational materials aimed at the general public.

94. Wishing to make the greatest possible contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting peace during the difficult times that lie ahead, the Committee calls upon all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of the role of the Committee and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

II. GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS RESOLUTION ON BETHLEHEM 2000

At its 61st plenary meeting, held on 18 November 1998, the General Assembly considered agenda item 159 entitled "Bethlehem 2000." The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed the meeting. The full text of his statement is reproduced below (see A/53/PV.61):

(*interpretation from French*): Our Lord Jesus Christ said, in a sublime message:

"So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!" (*The Holy Koran, XIX:33*)

What could be more natural than that, as the third millennium dawns, an entire year be devoted to commemorating the birth of this Lord of Peace.

As the twentieth century draws to an end, the peoples of the entire world await with growing impatience the arrival of the new millennium in the hope of a better world, a world of peace, reconciliation and understanding among all peoples in all parts of the world. The celebration of the next millennium will be particularly important, for it will also mark the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, which brought to the small town of Bethlehem, in Palestine, a cultural and religious significance that is unique throughout history. This event is thus of monumental importance, not only to the Palestinian people and to the Middle East, but to all the world's believers and to all the international community.

The commemoration of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is particularly symbolic, for it comes at a time when the peoples of the region have new hope and new reasons for believing that the question of Palestine will reach a peaceful outcome which will promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region. It is our hope today that this commemoration will herald the dawn of a new era of dialogue, reconciliation and economic recovery for Palestinians, Israelis and all the peoples of the Middle East.

The name Bethlehem evokes scenes of rare beauty, enhanced by breathtakingly beautiful landscapes and by the perfect and symbiotic meshing of Eastern and Western cultures. Unfortunately, decades of conflict have altered the precious treasures of Bethlehem and have had a negative impact on the socio-economic infrastructure of the town and the surrounding areas. Many magnificent buildings now need restoration. The infrastructures in the town have to be rebuilt, particularly given that massive numbers of pilgrims are expected to arrive from all corners of the globe.

Responding to the appeal made by President Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, at the conference in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People held in Brussels in February 1998, our Committee indicated that it would fully support the Bethlehem 2000 project of the Palestinian Authority.

The project includes commemorative cultural events that will be international in character, the restoration and modernization of the city's infrastructure, the improvement of basic social, health and security services, preservation of the rich Palestinian history and the provision of all the necessary tourist services.

The conference of participants in the Bethlehem 2000 project, which was also held in Brussels, in May 1998 - and which I had the privilege of attending together with President Arafat, the President of the European Community and the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) - showed the broad international support for the project on the part of donor Governments, organizations within the United

Nations system, the European Commission, UNESCO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, other intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, the media and non-governmental organizations. The level of contributions to date is very encouraging. At the same time, more must be done to ensure the success of this commendable Palestinian initiative at a time when the Palestinian people still face serious difficulties.

The Committee is firmly convinced that the reconstruction of the historic sites in this Holy Land will be a well-deserved tribute to the historic and religious importance of Bethlehem on the occasion of the commemoration of the millennium, particularly for future generations, for whom Bethlehem will always be the symbol of lasting spiritual and cultural harmony. The Committee also believes that solid improvements on the ground in the area around Bethlehem are necessary, especially with regard to guaranteeing freedom of movement and free and unhindered access to the holy places in Bethlehem for the faithful of all religions and nationalities.

The Committee is doing all it can to inform and mobilize public opinion in all regions in support of this project through meetings and other activities to provide information. In this context the Committee, with the support of the Italian Government, will be organizing early next year in Rome an international conference on Bethlehem 2000 designed to promote this initiative and to ensure the broadest possible international participation in it. The conference will be an opportunity for all parties concerned to increase dialogue and cooperation for the promotion of peace and reconciliation, to assess the progress made in the project and to determine needs, with a view to mobilizing additional international support.

This event can be successful only if there is commitment and participation by the international community as a whole. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People believes that the commemoration of the millennium in Bethlehem is a unique opportunity for all peoples, whatever their beliefs, race or nationality, to come together to reflect upon the lessons of the unique messages of peace, reconciliation and love which have come from this crossroads of history and of the world.

There can be no better time for us to reaffirm our belief in these eternal messages. There can be no better time for members of the human race to be reconciled with each other and to heal the wounds inflicted by past conflicts so that we can at last reaffirm our desire for a better life for all at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

The events to commemorate the millennium in Bethlehem will begin at Christmas 1999 and continue until Easter 2001.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I now have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled "Bethlehem 2000". First of all, I should like to take this opportunity to announce that Algeria, Guyana and Niger have also sponsored the draft resolution.

In the draft resolution, the General Assembly welcomes the global and historic event to mark both the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the third millennium. It associates itself fully with the Palestinian initiative for the Bethlehem 2000 project and encourages the international community, in particular the bodies of the United Nations, to offer assistance to bring about the objectives set forth therein. In order for this commemoration to be duly channelled and supported in a spirit of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, a request has again been made that the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" be included in the provisional agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

(*spoke in English*)

I would like, on behalf of the sponsors of the draft resolution, to introduce the following revision in the first preambular paragraph. The words

"Bethlehem, in the Palestinian land" should be replaced with the words "the Palestinian city of Bethlehem". The entire paragraph would then read:

"*Recalling* the fact that the Palestinian city of Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus Christ and one of the most historic and significant sites on earth."

(*spoke in French*)

I should like to extend the Committee's deep appreciation to Governments, bodies of the United Nations and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations which from the very beginning have embraced the idea of the Bethlehem 2000 project by making their contribution and supporting the spirit of this initiative.

The draft resolution reflects our hopes and our common aspirations for a better world at the dawn of the new millennium. The Committee believes that consensus adoption of the draft resolution will contribute to supporting and promoting the peace process which we all hold dear. I would therefore encourage all Member States to support the draft resolution by adopting it by consensus.

At the conclusion of the debate, the Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution 53/27 entitled "Bethlehem 2000." The full text is reproduced below:

Bethlehem 2000

The General Assembly,

Recalling the fact that Bethlehem, in the Palestinian land, is the birthplace of Jesus Christ and one of the most historic and significant sites on earth,

Noting that the world will celebrate in Bethlehem, a city of peace, the onset of the new millennium in a global vision of hope for all peoples,

Stressing the monumental importance of the event for the Palestinian people, for the peoples of the region and for the international community as a whole, as it comprises significant religious, historical and cultural dimensions,

Aware of the Bethlehem 2000 project as a multifaceted undertaking for commemoration of the event, which will begin at Christmas, 1999, and conclude at Easter, 2001,

Aware also of the needed assistance with regard to the above-mentioned project, and expressing appreciation for the steps taken towards increasing the engagement and participation of the international community, including donor countries, and organizations of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, as well as the European Commission, religious institutions and others,

Expressing the need for immediate change in the situation on the ground in the vicinity of Bethlehem, especially with regard to ensuring freedom of movement,

Stressing the need for ensuring free and unhindered access to the holy places in Bethlehem to the faithful of all religions and citizens of all nationalities,

Expressing the hope for rapid progress in the Middle East peace process and the achievement of the final settlement between the Palestinian and Israeli sides within the agreed time, so that the millennium may be celebrated most appropriately in an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation,

1. *Welcomes* the impending arrival of this global, historic celebration in Bethlehem of the birth

of Jesus Christ and the onset of the third millennium as a symbol of the shared hope for peace among all peoples of the world;

2. *Expresses support* for the Bethlehem 2000 project and commends the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority in this regard;

3. *Notes with appreciation* the assistance given by the international community in support of the Bethlehem 2000 project, and calls for increased assistance and engagement by the international community as a whole, including private sector participation, to ensure the success of the Bethlehem 2000 project and the fruition of this monumental commemoration;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to mobilize the pertinent organizations and agencies of the United Nations system to increase their efforts towards ensuring the success of the Bethlehem 2000 project;

5. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fourth session the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" so that the General Assembly may have a renewed opportunity to reaffirm its further support for the event immediately prior to the occasion of its commemoration.

III. INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, 30 NOVEMBER 1998

On 30 November 1998, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed at United Nations Headquarters in New York and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, as well as in several other cities, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

All States Members of the United Nations, specialized agencies and observers were invited to attend the solemn meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

At that meeting, statements were made by Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; Didier Opertti (Uruguay), President of the General Assembly; Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General; and A. Peter Burleigh, (United States), President of the Security Council for the month of November 1998.

The Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations read out a message from YasserArafat, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Also, John de Saram (Sri Lanka) made a statement as Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

In addition, Khiphusizi Jele, the representative of South Africa, read out a message from Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa, in his capacity as Chairman of the Thirteenth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, the representative of Qatar, read out a message from Sheikh Hamed Bin Jassem Bin Jaber Al-Thani, President of Qatar, in his capacity as Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Said Kamal, Under-Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs in the League of Arab States, read out the message from Ahmed Esmat Abdel Meguid, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. A further

statement was made by David Graybeal, the representative of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine.

Concluding statements were made by Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and by the Chairman of the Committee.

The text of all statements and messages in connection with the Day of Solidarity will be included in a special bulletin to be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

A cultural exhibit entitled "Bethlehem 2000," featuring arts and crafts from Bethlehem, as well as photographs of traditional architecture in Bethlehem was presented with contributions from the Palestinian Authority Committee for Information Services and UNESCO. The exhibit was on display at the Public Lobby of the United Nations Secretariat from 30 November to 6 December 1998. The exhibit was sponsored by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations. At the opening on 30 November 1998, the Chairman of the Committee made a statement, followed by a statement by Mr. Kaddoumi.

IV. DEBATE ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE OPENS IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On 30 November 1998, the debate on agenda item 39, "Question of Palestine," began in the General Assembly. In accordance with past practice, the item was taken up in the plenary. The annual report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was introduced by its Rapporteur. The full text of both statements is presented below:

Statement by the Chairman

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): I am greatly honoured once again to open the annual debate in the General Assembly on the question of Palestine in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Certti on his election as President of the Assembly and on the way in which he has guided our work at this session.

As the Assembly is aware, the item on the question of Palestine was reintroduced in the agenda of the General Assembly in 1974 when, after many years, it became apparent that the question of the fate and the rights of the Palestinian people had been overshadowed by inter-State conflicts. This question was not at that time among the issues discussed by the international community. The inclusion of the question in the agenda resulted above all from the recognition on the part of the international community at that time that the Arab-Israeli conflict could not be resolved peacefully until the question of Palestine--the core issue of the conflict--was settled equitably and on the basis of the recognition and exercise of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

The Assembly has defined those rights unambiguously and, in resolution 3236 (XXIX), adopted at the twenty-ninth session, it reaffirmed that they included Palestinians' right to self-determination without external interference, their right to independence and national sovereignty, their right to return to homes from which they had been displaced and uprooted and their right to recover their property. In resolutions ES-7/3 and 35/169 A,

both adopted in 1980, it also reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to establish its own sovereign independent State.

After so many years, and despite endless debates and the adoption of countless resolutions and declarations by the Security Council and the General Assembly, many other United Nations bodies, intergovernmental organizations and Governments, the dream of an independent Palestinian State has still not been realized.

Despite the hopes that were raised around the world by the agreements signed in 1991 and 1993, increasingly dark and heavy clouds have come to loom over the peace process, and numerous obstacles have impeded the process to the point of jeopardizing the achievements that were built up between 1991 and 1996.

Today, more than 50 years after the partition of Palestine, almost half of the 7 million Palestinians still live in refugee camps with no possibility of returning to their homes and villages or of being compensated for the loss of their property. Their economic problems and constant insecurity, the punitive raids against them and the psychological suffering of this people may not perhaps hit the headlines, but they should serve as a reminder of the historical injustice that has been done to the Palestinian people.

Since 1967, some 350,000 settlers have established themselves in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, in continuous violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which clearly stipulates that the occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

The creation of settlements has intensified in recent years, and it is continuing relentlessly. East Jerusalem has been illegally annexed and surrounded by colonies that not only cut it off from its natural hinterland in the West Bank but separate it from its Arab population by means of the establishment of extremist settler enclaves. Thus, Al-Khalil, a Palestinian town of over 100,000 people, had to be divided in such a way that 30,000 people must live under occupation so that just 400 settlers can remain there in complete security.

Land continues to be confiscated not only to allow for new settlements and for the expansion of existing ones, but to enable bypass roads to be constructed linking the settlements to each other and to Israel. The occupied territory is gradually being fragmented into a patchwork of separate zones that can be closed and easily controlled by military force. The prolonged closure of the zones under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and the constant denial of free passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip significantly disrupt the daily lives of Palestinians and cause serious damage to the young Palestinian economy. Such measures also undermine the credibility of the peace agreements, create mistrust between the parties and give rise to serious doubts about the possibility of reaching an understanding at a time when confidence-building measures should be given pride of place.

Throughout those long years, and despite all the suffering that they have endured, the Palestinian people have never despaired. They have continued steadfastly to believe in the justice of their cause and have patiently appealed to the international community to help restore their inalienable rights.

The historic compromise of 1993, which is based on mutual recognition by the two parties and the establishment of a negotiating process aimed at implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and in which the Palestinians participated as full and equal partners, was an important milestone. The agreements achieved since then, including the recent Wye River Memorandum, show that a diplomatic solution that takes into account the rights and needs of both parties is indeed possible.

The sporadic incidents of violence by extremists on both sides who are opposed to

reconciliation and the signing of agreements only underscores the need to act diligently and resolutely in order to bring about a just and peaceful settlement. It is clear that if such a settlement is to endure, it must be widely accepted and cannot be imposed by one side to serve its own interests. Israel's understandable security concerns will not be properly addressed by unilateral actions, in particular by building settlements. Such measures, which dispossess Palestinians of their assets and deprive them of their rights and well-being, do not foster a climate of confidence or an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence.

Our Committee, which was established to assist in achieving a just settlement of the Palestinian question that would enable the Palestinians to exercise their rights, has always welcomed the peace process as a historic step in the search for peace. We have endeavoured to assist by carrying out our mandate while continuing to press for the full exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in accordance with international law.

We wish to express our deep gratitude to the many Governments and international organizations from around the world that have assisted us in our work this year, in particular the Government of Belgium for hosting the international Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in Brussels; the Government of Egypt for hosting the International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations and the seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, in Cairo; and the Government of Chile for hosting the Latin American and Caribbean Seminar and Symposium on Non-Governmental Organizations, in Santiago.

Our gratitude goes also to the Government of Italy for offering to host the Bethlehem 2000 international conference in Rome next February and to the Government of Namibia for offering to host the African meeting in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Windhoek in April next year.

We will continue to cooperate with all Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations in their efforts to promote the just and peaceful settlement that we all desire until such time as the Palestinians can gain the seat that is rightfully theirs among the States members of the Assembly.

As Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I should like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the four draft resolutions that have been circulated under this agenda item: A/53/L.48, A/53/L.49, A/53/L.50 and A/53/L.51. I wish to inform the Assembly that Algeria and Mali have joined the sponsors of the four draft resolutions.

The first three draft resolutions relate to the activities, respectively, of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, of the Division for Palestinian Rights and of the Department of Public Information. They reiterate the important mandates already conferred by large majorities in the General Assembly while seeking to take into account recent political developments and to build on recent experience in carrying out their programmes of work.

In accordance with the objectives of the Committee, we wish with these draft resolutions to ensure that our efforts in the coming year in support of Palestinian rights and of a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine are as useful and constructive as possible. We also intend to rationalize the use of our resources by targeting areas where our activities can be the most decisive, in cooperation, of course, with the relevant units of the Secretariat. Provision for the activities outlined in these draft resolutions is already included in the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

The text of the fourth draft resolution, on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, reflects the position of the General Assembly with respect to the central aspects of a settlement and reproduces the text of the previous resolution on this

subject, while updating it to take into account, above all, the signing of the Wye River Memorandum and the hopes it has aroused.

These draft resolutions confirm positions, mandates and work programmes that are of particular importance at this crucial stage of the peace process. I therefore call on the General Assembly to give them even more massive support than that received by past resolutions.

Statement by the Rapporteur

As Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, it is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

During the past year, the Committee continued to do its utmost to implement the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. This document covers the Committee's activities, as well as the new developments relating to the question of Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process since last year's report.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which describes briefly the Committee's objectives and concerns in the light of the evolving situation. Chapters II and III summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the Department of Public Information and give information on the Committee's organization of work.

Chapter IV contains information on the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee in the course of the year. Although welcoming the signing of the Wye River Memorandum, which helped restart the peace process, the Committee expressed much concern at the worsening of the situation on the ground, including continued and escalating Israeli settlement activities throughout the occupied territory, and in particular in and around Jerusalem. As was the case last year, the Committee was alarmed by the position of the Government of Israel on the question of Jerusalem in general, especially its plans for the creation of what has been termed a Greater Jerusalem umbrella municipality, settlement construction in the neighbourhoods of Jebel Abu Ghneim and Ras al-Amud, Israel's policy with respect to Palestinian residency rights in Jerusalem, demolition of Palestinian houses and the closures of and curfews imposed on the Palestinian territory.

The main body of the report is in chapter V, which gives an account of the action taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/49. It details the action taken in the Security Council and the General Assembly, including participation in the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and the meeting of the Security Council on 30 June 1998. The chapter also covers the Committee's initiative in requesting the inclusion of the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" in the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly. The chapter contains information on the participation by the Committee Chairman in the relevant international conferences, meetings and summits, at which he represented the Committee, as well as on the results of his efforts.

Chapter V also describes adjustments made by the Committee in its programme of work in order to meet the evolving situation in the most effective and constructive manner, while keeping in mind the continuing financial constraints of the Organization. The Bureau continued its useful and constructive dialogue with the European Union. During the year, the Committee organized a number of important meetings, namely the high-level Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the subsequent European Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, both held at Brussels in February; the United Nations International Meeting of Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine and the subsequent seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, both held at Cairo in April; the Latin

American and Caribbean Seminar and Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held at Santiago in May; and the North American Symposium of Non-Governmental Organizations, held at Headquarters in June. In this context, I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound thanks to the Governments of Belgium, Egypt and Chile for providing the venues and for facilitating the holding of these important events.

This chapter also provides information on the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the areas of research, monitoring and publications, on the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and on the assistance given for the electronic conversion of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. It also contains information on the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority in the workings of the United Nations. Finally, the chapter describes the 1998 observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/51, including the publications and audio-visual activities of the Department and other activities carried out by the Department.

Chapter VII, the last chapter of the report, contains the conclusions of the Committee and its recommendations to the General Assembly. The Committee notes that, despite the undeniable achievements of the peace process since 1993, the dispossession of the Palestinian people has lasted for over a century and the dream of a Palestinian State is still unfulfilled. Most of the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem, remain under occupation, vulnerable to exploitation of resources, land confiscation and encroaching settlements.

The Committee believes that, as humankind prepares to enter the new millennium, it is incumbent upon the co-sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the international community as a whole to do everything within their power to achieve peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, which is so essential for international peace and security.

The Committee is of the view that the policies and practices of occupation, which seek to create actuality on the ground and to alter permanently the demographic composition of the occupied territory, violate the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood and make the achievement of real peace impossible. The international community, in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, must intensify its efforts to ensure protection for the Palestinian people, pending the achievement of a final settlement.

The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement based on international legitimacy is reached. The Committee reiterates that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance for development, is essential for the success of the peace process.

The Committee considers that its programme of meetings in the various regions and its cooperation with non-governmental organizations have played a useful role in heightening international awareness of the relevant issues and in achieving wider recognition of and support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Committee intends to continue to review and assess its programme in order to achieve maximum effectiveness and to respond adequately to developments.

The Committee supports the Bethlehem 2000 project launched by the Palestinian Authority. It requested the inclusion of an item on Bethlehem

2000 in the agenda of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly in order to mobilize wide international support for the event. The Committee is planning to convene a Bethlehem 2000 international conference at the Rome headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) next February, with the agreement and support of the Italian Government.

The Committee stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the objectives of the Committee and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other activities, in particular the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine and the completion of the project for the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. It also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its usefulness, and requests that it be continued.

The Committee also considers that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion of the relevant issues. The Committee calls for the strengthening of cooperation and coordination with the Department, and requests it to give particular attention to the preparation of audio-visual and other informational materials on the question of Palestine aimed at the general public.

Finally, the Committee calls upon all States to join in its endeavour to make the greatest possible contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting peace during the difficult times ahead, and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of the role of the Committee and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly by facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

V. SECRETARY-GENERAL ISSUES STATEMENT ON BOMBING IN JERUSALEM

The following statement was issued on 6 November 1998 by the Spokesman for Secretary-General Kofi Annan (see SG/SM/6786):

The Secretary-General has learned with deep regret that another bombing has occurred in Jerusalem, causing loss of life and further human suffering. He condemns such acts, which have the obvious purpose of derailing the peace process. Those who espouse terrorism and violence must not be allowed to stand in the way of the pursuit of peace that for too long has eluded the Israeli and Palestinian people.

VI. SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES REPORTS ON SITUATION

The thirtieth report of the Special Committee (A/53/661) was issued on 11 November 1998 and transmitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General. It was followed by two periodic reports (A/53/136 and Add1.), which were transmitted to the Assembly on 3 June and 10 November 1998, respectively. In accordance with established practice, the consideration of these reports was allocated to the Assembly's Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), together with related reports of the Secretary-General.

The reports under this item were summarized as follows in a press release issued at United Nations Headquarters (see GA/SPD/152):

The report of the Special Committee describes its work in 1998, including the holding of sessions and the gathering of information in Geneva, Cairo, Amman, Damascus and New York. The materials and testimony used to prepare the report are included in Annex II. The Committee - using the testimony of persons from the occupied territories, newspaper reports and written material supplied by the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan - addresses the human rights situation of the Palestinian people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Evidence received by the Special Committee showed that restrictions with respect to land, housing and water in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem severely affected the quality of life. It was estimated that more than 74 per cent of the land in the West Bank and some 40 per cent of land in the Gaza Strip had been confiscated by Israel since 1967. Lands confiscated have been used for, among other things, the building of new settlements. Palestinian-owned land confiscated in East Jerusalem is in the heart of the part of the Old City exclusively inhabited by Arabs. Those confiscations were believed to be aimed at reaffirming Israeli sovereignty over all parts of the city.

According to the report, in August 1996 the Israeli Government officially lifted the freeze on the building of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and in February 1997 authorized the building of a new settlement, to be named Har Homa, in Jabal Abu-Ghneim, in East Jerusalem, with construction beginning on 18 March 1997. Har Homa was to constitute the last link in the chain of settlements completely encircling Arab-populated East Jerusalem. The Secretary-General stated that, demographically, the establishment of the settlement would have a significant effect on further advancing the forced alteration of the religious and ethnic composition of occupied East Jerusalem. He further indicated that, economically, the establishment of a settlement on the site was expected to have damaging effects on an already devastated Palestinian economy in the occupied territories.

According to the report, no new structural plans had been established for zones inhabited by Palestinians, although the number of inhabitants had risen sharply. As an example, the city of Nablus had 30,000 inhabitants in 1944 and now had 108,000. The housing shortage was particularly acute in East Jerusalem. While there was no Jewish population in that part of the city in 1967, there were now about 160,000 Jews in East Jerusalem and Arabs constituted a minority in the city. Some 34 per cent of East Jerusalem had been completely annexed. Israel controls the principal aquifer under the West Bank, as well as most of the water sources supplying Palestinians in Gaza. In addition, restrictions on the freedom of movements

of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem are administered by way of passports, identity cards, travel permits and closures.

The report further states that Israelis and settlers had unlimited access to water all year round, at prices below those paid by Palestinians. Settlers have unlimited supplies of water and are estimated to consume five times as much as Palestinians. Many maintain swimming pools, even at times when Palestinians faced severe water shortages. It was estimated that the 3,000 to 4,000 settlers living in the Gaza Strip used 75 per cent of the available ground water, while the approximately 1 million Palestinians used less than 25 per cent. The high level of contamination and salinity of the water in Gaza also gave rise to water-borne diseases.

According to the report, another area of concern to the Committee involved the interrogation procedures used by Israel's General Security Service. The Service is permitted to conduct interrogations under government guidelines, which allow for the use of moderate physical pressure. Those guidelines were deemed completely unacceptable by the Committee against Torture. Since October 1994, the Service had been authorized to apply special measures relating to physical pressure on Palestinian detainees, which are believed to amount to aggravated forms of torture. Methods of interrogation used by the Service included suspension with hands tied behind the back, hooding, sleep and food deprivation, position abuse, exposure to very loud music, very bright light and extremes of heat and cold, as well as violent shaking. Violent shaking can cause permanent incapacitation or death through brain haemorrhaging, but did not leave any visible traces on the body.

It has been estimated that some 1,000 to 1,500 Palestinians are interrogated by the Israeli intelligence every year and that 85 per cent of them are subjected to torture, the report states. One former administrative detainee told the Special Committee that he had been questioned up to eight times a day over a period of 60 to 70 days. He had been deprived of sleep for 14 consecutive days. In addition, he had spent four days on a small stool and had been suspended for three or four days, which he described as worse than beating. The Committee against Torture deemed that such interrogation methods constituted breaches of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment, which Israel had ratified in 1991.

The report went on to note that the Israeli authorities made extensive use of administrative detention, without charges or trial, of Palestinians suspected of being linked to security-related offences and matters. Administrative detainees were denied due process of law. Some Palestinians have been held in administrative detention for several years. Witnesses testifying before the Special Committee emphasized the arbitrariness of administrative detention.

Serious economic and social problems exist in the occupied territories as well, according to the report. The Special Committee was told by witnesses that employment opportunities in Gaza were currently nil and the economic situation was very bad. Israel was deemed directly responsible for the situation, which had led to serious social polarization between the rich and the poor in the occupied Palestinian territories. The borders were closed and all goods coming in and out of the Gaza Strip had to transit through Israel. Such perishable produce as vegetables and flowers were particularly affected, since they were allowed to wilt or spoil on the pretext of security checks and in view of the fact that Gaza still had no seaport or airport.

The report's findings in regard to the Syrian Golan were also addressed. The Golan was occupied by Israel in 1967 and annexed in 1981. That decision had not been recognized by the international community and, in particular, the United Nations. Also, the population of the Golan had opposed Israeli moves to impose its law, jurisdiction and administration. The Golan was

important to Israel because of its strategic position with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic, its vast water resources and prime agricultural land. There were numerous settlements in the Golan, the largest one being Katzrin, which was being expanded, as were a number of others, especially since the current Israeli Government took office in 1996.

The periodic report of the Special Committee (document A/53/136 and Add.1) summarizes information on reported violations, based on various sources quoted in the Israeli press and in the Arab-language newspapers published in the occupied territories between 30 August and 31 December 1997.

In the report, the Special Committee describes in detail general developments in the occupied territories, including the killing of Palestinians by Israeli troops or civilians; incidents and deaths resulting from the occupation; and the administration of justice as it applies to the Palestinian and Israeli populations. It also addresses the treatment of civilians, including harassment and physical ill-treatment; and collective punishment, such as the imposition of curfew.

Also contained in the report is information on the economic and social situation in the occupied territories and the situation of children. In addition, the report reviews measures affecting the fundamental freedoms of movement, education, religion and expression, as well as listing settler activities affecting the civilian population. The report also includes the treatment of detainees, annexation and settlement, and information concerning the occupied Syrian Golan.

Also before the Committee was the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Special Committee on Israeli Practices (document A/53/259), which describes the facilities provided to the Special Committee and the activities of the Department of Public Information (DPI) in support of the Special Committee and the Commission on Human Rights.

The Secretary-General's report on the occupied Syrian Golan (document A/53/260) indicates that the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel requesting information on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/68, which called on Israel, among other things, to desist from changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan and, in particular, to desist from the establishment of settlements. The Secretary-General had received no reply, as of 12 August 1998.

Also before the Committee was a report of the Secretary-General on the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem (document A/53/264). In it, the Secretary-General states that he addressed a note verbale to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel regarding compliance with General Assembly resolution 52/67, by which the Assembly demanded that Israel, as the occupying Power, cease all practices and actions that violated the human rights of the Palestinian people and called upon Israel to accelerate the release of all remaining Palestinians arbitrarily detained, in line with agreements reached. As of 18 August 1998, the Secretary-General had received no reply.

Also, in the Secretary-General's report on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories (document A/53/660), he indicates that a note verbale was sent to the Foreign Minister of Israel regarding compliance with General Assembly resolution 52/65, by which the Assembly reaffirmed that the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War was applicable to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967. As of 10 November 1998, he had received no reply.

VII. UNRWA COMMISSIONER-GENERAL REPORTS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In accordance with past practice, the General Assembly agenda item on Palestine refugees was allocated to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly. The Committee had before it the annual report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/53/13) and a number of other reports submitted by the Secretary-General. The reports were summarized as follows in a press release issued at Headquarters (see GA/SPD/147):

The report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (document A/53/13) refers to general developments in the Agency's main programmes in education, health and relief and social services; financial matters, budget, income, expenditure and extra-budgetary activities; the Agency's current financial situation; legal matters; information on UNRWA programmes and operations in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Two annexes also provide statistical and financial information and refer to pertinent records of the General Assembly and other United Nations bodies.

According to the report, the Agency continued to emphasize basic services for Palestine refugees and contributing to improving socio-economic conditions in refugee communities. Living standards in refugee communities remained poor throughout the area of operations and were characterized in some fields by high unemployment, falling household income, overburdened infrastructure and restrictions on employment and mobility. In view of unabated financial difficulties, the Agency was forced to introduce further austerity and cost-reduction measures that affected the quality and level of services.

UNRWA's ability to deliver services to the Palestine refugees was negatively affected by continuing financial shortfalls, the report says. Despite the steps taken in recent years to reconcile expenditure with income, at mid-1997 the Agency still faced a budget deficit of $70 million for the year, representing the funding shortfall against the $312 million General Assembly-approved cash budget. More importantly, the gap between estimated income and minimum expenditure on basic needs stood at $20 million. The seriousness of the situation was such that, had no further action been taken, the Agency would have run out of funds completely in the last quarter of 1997 and been forced to suspend operations until fresh contributions were received. To avert that outcome, there was no alternative but to introduce yet another round of austerity and cost-reduction measures. The announcement of those measures elicited swift and strong opposition from the Palestine refugee community and host authorities, including protests held at UNRWA offices throughout the area of operations and a temporary boycott of Agency schools in the Gaza Strip.

However, the report says tangible progress was achieved in combating the ongoing deficit problem. Through its regular programme, UNRWA continued to provide education, health care, relief assistance and social services to the 3.5 million Palestine refugees registered with the Agency in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Agency services included elementary and preparatory schooling, vocational and technical training and comprehensive primary health care, including family health.

While not denying that any reduction in services would obviously be a negative development, UNRWA sought to clarify that the measures announced were necessitated by insufficient funds, the report says. With $21 million in additional funding from generous donors, the Agency was able to revoke the measures which had provoked the strongest opposition, namely

those relating to hospitalization and school charges, after which the controversy surrounding the matter subsided.

According to the report, there was a growing concern within the region in general and among the refugee community in particular that UNRWA might be phased out before a solution to the Palestine refugee issue was achieved. That concern had begun to manifest itself following the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, which had foreseen the eventual resolution of the long-standing refugee issue and an end to the Agency's mission. Accusations were voiced in the local media and other forums, particularly in Lebanon, that UNRWA was in the process of being phased out as a prelude to liquidation of the refugee issue, and that the Agency did not have the refugees' best interests at heart.

The report says that UNRWA's humanitarian work was carried out against the backdrop of the continuing impasse in the various tracks of the peace process, despite intensive diplomatic initiatives focused on the Israeli- Palestinian track. By the end of June 1998, further redeployments in the West Bank were still awaited and there had been little progress on other interim issues called for in the agreements between the parties, which would have implications for the situation on the ground in the occupied territory. Moreover, the permanent status negotiations, which were to include the issue of refugees, had not yet commenced in substance in accordance with the agreed timetable. The security situation remained tense, with sporadic clashes and protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and occasional acts of violence leading to fatalities.

Socio-economic conditions continued to deteriorate in the Gaza Strip, the smallest and most densely populated of UNRWA's five fields of operation, according to the report. Poor economic conditions, including reduced purchasing power and high unemployment, were exacerbated by the continued closure of the Gaza Strip, which had a particularly negative effect owing to heavy reliance on the employment of workers in Israel and on the import and export of raw materials and finished goods.

As the interim period set out in the Declaration of Principles drew to a close, the prospect of an agreed solution to the refugee issue appeared remote and the future course of the Middle East peace process uncertain, the report says. The Palestine refugees, who marked five decades of exile in 1998, continued to face declining standards of living and an increasingly tense regional environment and still relied on UNRWA to meet fundamental needs, education for children and young people, basic health care, support for the disadvantaged and opportunities for self-betterment. Moreover, UNRWA continued to cooperate with Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and the Palestinian Authority in providing services to Palestine refugees throughout the area of operations.

Furthermore, mid-1998 marked the second anniversary of the completion of the relocation of UNRWA headquarters from Vienna to Gaza in July 1996, the report says. While the return of Agency headquarters to the area of operations conferred many advantages, the drawbacks faced at the principal headquarters' location at Gaza continued to pose problems during the period under review. In many instances, the Agency remained unable to identify qualified local staff to fill vacancies at the salaries it was able to offer, while conditions of service in Gaza made it more difficult to attract and retain international staff. The lack of proximity to diplomatic missions, the problems arising from local infrastructure and the restrictions on movement arising from Israeli security-related constraints were not conducive to the effective functioning of a headquarters operation. While the Agency continued to strive to overcome those challenges, it was becoming increasingly clear that certain difficulties were inherent and would remain for the foreseeable future.

On the issue of education, the report says that under long-standing exchange agreements with host authorities to provide schooling for pupils in remote areas, 186,290 refugee pupils were reportedly enrolled at government and private schools at the elementary and preparatory levels, while 39,942 non-refugee pupils attended UNRWA schools. In all five fields of operation, UNRWA's basic education programme continued to be carried out in accordance with host authority education systems. Senior Agency staff in all fields continued to participate in educational development activities of host authorities, particularly in forums dealing with policies that might affect the Agency's education programme.

According to the report, UNRWA's health programme remained focused on comprehensive primary health care, including a full range of maternal and child health and family planning services, school health services, health education and promotion activities, and specialist care, with an emphasis on gynaecology and obstetrics, paediatrics and cardiology. However, the health programme continued to be negatively affected by the austerity and other cost-reduction measures implemented since 1993 in response to funding shortfalls. The Agency continued to pursue cost containment and efficiency enhancement measures in the health programme to make the best use of the limited resources available.

Regarding relief and social services, the report says there were 3.52 million Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA on 30 June 1998, an increase of 3.0 per cent over the figure from the year before. UNRWA continued to assist refugee families unable to meet basic needs for food, shelter and other life essentials through the special hardship programme. The number of refugees in households meeting the stringent eligibility criteria -no male adult medically fit to earn an income and no other identifiable means of financial support above a defined threshold - increased by 5.6 per cent. Under its poverty alleviation programme, UNRWA continued to assist disadvantaged refugees, especially women, in raising their socio-economic status through skills training, production units, group-guaranteed savings and loan schemes, and credit provision. The programme focused on special hardship cases with a view to enabling them to achieve a level of income sufficient to be removed from the hardship rolls.

Furthermore, UNRWA's income-generation programme continued to support small-scale and micro-enterprises within the refugee community by providing capital investment and working capital loans through field-based revolving loan funds, and by providing technical assistance, the report stated. The programme aimed to create and maintain jobs, generate income for participants, support sustainable enterprises and encourage the participation of women in economic life. In the Gaza Strip, where UNRWA's income-generation efforts were concentrated, business activity was heavily influenced by closures and movement restrictions, which contributed to unemployment, hindered movement of finished goods and raw materials and increased business costs.

The report stated that most of the 365,000 Palestine refugees registered in Lebanon faced deplorable living conditions and depended almost entirely on UNRWA for basic services. The deteriorating socio-economic situation in the country, combined with the inability of those refugees to gain full access to the job market or to avail themselves of public health facilities, heightened their desperation and misery. Since the resources available to UNRWA were insufficient to cope with the growing needs of the refugee community in Lebanon, the Agency launched a special emergency appeal on 10 July 1997 at Geneva, seeking $11 million in additional contributions to support essential health, education, and relief and social services activities. Eight countries and one intergovernmental organization responded generously to the appeal, announcing total pledges of $9.3 million by 30 June 1998.

On legal matters, the report states that the number of UNRWA staff members arrested and

detained throughout the area of operations increased from 44 in the previous reporting period to 61 in the current reporting period, although most staff members were released without charge or trial after relatively short periods of detention. The Agency was not always provided with adequate and timely information by the relevant authorities - both Israel and the Palestinian Authority - as to the reasons for the arrest and detention of its staff members. UNRWA was for the first time able to obtain access to all Palestinian Authority detention centres in the Gaza Strip to visit detained staff members. However, it was only possible to visit staff detained in the Gaza Strip after long delays, sometimes over a year, particularly at facilities other than Gaza Central Prison.

The procedures imposed by the Israeli authorities on security grounds to regulate entry to and exit from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and entry to Jerusalem remained in place during the reporting period, the report stated. Following incidents of violence or as a preventive security measure, the Israeli authorities imposed full closures of the West Bank and/or the Gaza Strip on several occasions during the reporting period, lasting for a total of 57 days.

The Committee also had before it the report of the Secretary-General on persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities (document A/53/471). It states that the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he requested the Permanent Representative to inform him on any action his Government had taken or envisaged to take in implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/59 of 10 December 1997 which reaffirms the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

In a 19 August 1998 response by Israel to that request, its Permanent Representative replied that resolutions regarding UNRWA remained rife with political issues irrelevant to the work for which the Agency was responsible, and thus remained detached from the reality in the area.

"The agreements between Israel and Palestinians mark significant progress in the framework of the peace process", he writes. "Israel believes that this process is the only way to achieve historic reconciliation and lasting peace between the two sides. However, for this process to succeed, it is imperative that both sides abide by their commitments and resolve all outstanding issues through negotiations.

"Israel believes that UNRWA can play an important role in promoting the social and economic advancement foreseen in the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, within the limits of its humanitarian mandate, and accordingly looks forward to continuing the cooperation and good working relationship with UNRWA."

The report further states that the Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the provision of services. So far as is known to the Agency, between 1 July 1997 and 30 June 1998, 534 refugees registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 177 to the Gaza Strip. It should be noted that some of those may not themselves have been displaced in 1967, but might be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee whom they accompanied.

According to the report of the Secretary-General on offers by Member States of grants and scholarships for higher education, including vocational training for Palestine refugees (document A/53/472), Japan awarded 11 fellowships through UNRWA to Palestine refugees in 1997/98. Switzerland contributed some $1.7 million between 1989 and 1996, as well as $338,000 in 1997, to the UNRWA university scholarships programme for secondary school graduates.

The report further says that during the biennium 1997-1998, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) granted seven scholarships in favour of Palestinian students. The World Health Organization (WHO) provided 50 fellowship/study tours for qualified Palestinian candidates nominated by the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, the United World Colleges (UWC) established their own selection committee in UNRWA's area of operation, and have therefore not offered any scholarships through UNRWA for the 1997/98 academic year. One scholarship, however, has been offered through UNRWA for 1998/99 and is currently being processed.

According to an annex to the report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (document A/53/518 and Corr.1), the United Nations Secretariat has engaged a contractor for the modernization of the existing records and the project will be completed in early 1999. The Commission has authorized access by the designated representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization to its land records in the United Nations archives for the purpose of making a scanned image of those records.

The Committee also had before it the report of the Secretary-General on a University of Jerusalem "Al-Quds" for Palestine refugees (document A/53/551).

At the Secretary-General's request, the Rector of the United Nations University made available a highly qualified expert, Mihaly Simai, to assist in the preparation of the study, the report states. The expert was to visit the area and meet with Israeli officials. In a note verbale dated 25 August 1998 addressed to the Permanent Representative of Israel, the Secretary-General requested that the Government of Israel facilitate the visit of the expert.

The report states that on 10 October, the Permanent Representative of Israel informed the Secretary-General that Israel had voted consistently against the Assembly's resolution on the proposed [illegible]iversity, and its position remained unchanged. "It is clear that the sponsors of this resolution seek to exploit the field of higher education for political purposes totally extraneous to genuine academic pursuits", he writes. Accordingly, Israel considers that the proposed visit "would serve no useful purpose".

VIII. UNDP ISSUES STATEMENT ON ITS PROGRAMME OF ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE (PAPP)

On 3 November 1998, the following press release was issued by UNDP:

Making Wye work

Across the world people witnessed the historic signing ceremony on 23 October 1998 as Palestinian Authority Chairman Arafat, President Clinton and Prime Minister Netanyahu signed the Wye Memorandum in the White House in the presence of His Majesty, King Hussein of Jordan, This important agreement reinvigorated the long-stalled Middle East peace process and renewed hope for peace.

In addition to key provisions concerning land-for-peace and security, the Wye Memorandum also

called for the opening of a newly constructed Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip, safe passage for Palestinians moving between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the opening of a Gaza Industrial Estate and other matters related to economic development in the area.

Hours after Chairman Arafat returned to Gaza following the White House signing ceremony of the Wye Memorandum, UNDP/PAPP officials requested a meeting with him to discuss Palestinian priorities in order to realize immediately the economic opportunities that had been opened by the historic agreement. Following a meeting with Chairman Arafat and his senior advisers on 1 November, the next day UNDP/PAPP began work to implement two priority activities for the Palestinian Authority: finishing touches on the new airport in Gaza, which will be inaugurated soon, and the construction of passenger terminal facilities at Erez and Rafah to facilitate the safe passage principles agreed upon in the Memorandum.

The construction of the passenger terminal facilities will be carried out by UNDP/PAPP in co-operation with the Programme Management Unit of the Palestinian Economic Council for Reconstruction and Development (PECDAR/PMU), headed by Dr. Nabil Sharif, and will generate numerous employment opportunities in Gaza.

At the northern and southern tips of the Gaza Strip in Erez and Rafah, UNDP/PAPP will be constructing terminal facilities for passengers, including dining facilities, restrooms and covered parking spaces for automobiles, The total approximate contribution from UNDP/PAPP will amount to US$ 2.5 million in support of the above-mentioned activities.

"It is a pleasure, in less than two weeks after the signing of the Wye Memorandum, to be positioned to provide this needed assistance to the Palestinian people," remarked a senior official from the UNDP/PAPP Office in Gaza. "No other Organization has the capacity to move so quickly and Chairman Arafat personally chose these activities and expressed his appreciation for the quick action of UNDP/PAPP," he added.

For further information please contact Mr. Khaled Abdul Shafi, Head of the UNDP/PAPP in Gaza. Tel. No. 072827753; fax No. 07 2822021.

IX. DPI HOLDS ANNUAL TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PALESTINIAN JOURNALISTS

The following is an excerpt from a press release issued on 20 November 1998 (see DH/2770):

Nine Palestinian journalists from broadcast and print media on Friday completed a two-day training programme organized by the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI).

This was the fourth programme designed to assist the Palestinian people in building and strengthening their media capability. During the programme, the journalists attended briefings by officials of the United Nations and specialized agencies, along with representatives of media organizations in the United States.

Participants also attended two weeks of special classes at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs in New York. In addition, they received on-the-job training by serving as temporary United Nations correspondents, covering United Nations meetings and activities on behalf of their media organizations.

X. EXCERPTS FROM THE FINAL DOCUMENT ADOPTED BY THE TWELFTH CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF STATE OR GOVERNMENT OF NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES

The Twelfth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries was held at Durban, South Africa, from 29 August to 3 September 1998. Excerpts from the final document on the peace process in the Middle East, contained in the annex to document A/53/667-S/1998/1071 of 13 November 1998, are reproduced below:

A. Palestine and the Middle East

Palestine

184. The Heads of State or Government reiterated their traditional long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people and noted that these days mark the 50th anniversary of the dispossession of the Palestinian people and the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land, homes and properties. They called for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine, including those related to Palestinian refugees. They reiterated their support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homeland and to have their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, and they reiterated their demand for the withdrawal of Israel, the Occupying Power, from all the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the other Arab territories occupied since 1967.

185. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their position on occupied East Jerusalem, the illegal Israeli settlements and the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to all the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. They demanded that Israel, the Occupying Power, implement relevant Security Council resolutions in this regard and abide by its legal obligations. They reiterated their support for the recommendations contained in the resolutions adopted during the Tenth Emergency Special Session (ES-10/2, ES-10/3, ES-10/4 and ES-10/5) including, inter alia, the recommendation to convene a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention on measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and to ensure its respect in fulfilment of their collective responsibility as stipulated in common article 1 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

186. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of resolution 52/250 on the participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations and expressed confidence that Palestine would enjoy full membership in the United Nations in the near future, preferably during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. They also reiterated that Israeli representation in the work of the General Assembly must be in conformity with international law, thus ensuring that Israeli credentials do not cover the occupied territories since 1967, including Jerusalem.

187. The Heads of State or Government strongly condemned the decision of the Government of Israel on 21 June 1998 to take further steps to expand the jurisdiction and planned boundaries of Jerusalem. In this regard, they highly appreciated the efforts deployed by His Majesty Hassan II, King of Morocco, Chairperson of the Al-Quds Committee for the safeguard of Jerusalem. They fully supported the content of the Final Communiqué and the recommendations adopted by the Committee at its XVIIth Session held in Casablanca on 29 and 30 July 1998.

188. The Heads of State or Government expressed their deep concern over the current deadlock of the Palestinian-Israeli track of the Middle East peace process as a result of the policies and actions of the Israeli Government, in violation of the existing agreements, including settlement activities, repressive measures and economic suffocation of the Palestinian people. In this regard, they condemned

in particular the recent killing and wounding by the Israeli army of scores of Palestinian civilians. They called for increasing efforts to ensure compliance by Israel with the existing agreements and their timely implementation.

...

The peace process

192. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. They affirmed their determination to actively strive towards the attainment of this objective. They reiterated their support for the Middle East Peace Process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace. They further reiterated the need for compliance with and implementation of the agreements reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel as well as the fulfilment of the commitments and pledges made in accordance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the ensuing negotiations. They expressed grave concern over the current plight of the process, the deadlock of the Palestinian-Israeli track and the total cessation of the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks. They deplored the attempts of the Israeli Government to change the terms of reference of the peace process, to create facts on the ground which are obstacles to peace and to try to develop unacceptable concepts which are contrary to the principle of land for peace and the national rights of the Palestinian people.

193. In view of the urgency and seriousness of the situation, the Heads of State or Government request the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to increase pressure and use all available measures at the regional and international levels to ensure Israel's compliance with the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference and the land-for-peace principles and its full implementation of all agreements, undertakings and commitments reached by the concerned parties on all tracks during the peace talks. They also affirmed that failure by the Israeli Government to respond positively would require the Members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to take further appropriate measures.